

Ganny's Journal: A Tale of Human-Animal Kinship

Bettejeanne Hammond

Ganny Hammond

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This moving, imaginative effort is certain to strike a chord with animal lovers.

From experienced animal rehabilitation therapist Bettejeanne Hammond comes a sweet articulation of the relationship between a human and the dogs whom she lives with, if never quite “owns.” Speaking primarily through the voice of her beloved departed golden Labrador, Ganny, Hammond attempts to capture the highs and lows of her life with six dogs in *Ganny's Journal: A Tale of Human-Animal Kinship*.

The impetus for Ganny’s journaling comes via a series of health crises, several of which leave Hammond, called Bj for short, contemplating what life might be like without her loyal canine companion at her side. As Ganny delivers his recollections, it becomes increasingly clear that his reminiscing is motivated, at least in part, by a desire to help his human companion let him go with more joy than grief.

It is natural, in light of these organizing factors, that recollections begin at puppyhood and feature Ganny's mother, Doeska, and sister, Gally, as well as the three other dogs that make up their family. Two of these, Kringle and Lullies, frequently interject with their own memories, and such chapters become a cheerful exchange of imagined animal voices.

Hammond's method of storytelling is approachable, and readers may recall other projects in which authors have attempted to channel the voices of their animal companions, such as Dean Koontz's *A Big Little Life*. Chapter ends function as internal appendixes, with Hammond exploring human-canine therapies, and the extent to which humans can know the minds of the creatures around us: “What if our dogs...want to communicate with us or among themselves? How do they do that?...They think in visual images and transmit them telepathically,” she states.

Hammond comes to function as a medium within the project, and *Ganny's Journal* becomes less about anthropomorphizing her pet than about actually conveying his thoughts and feelings. Through Hammond, Ganny remembers mischievous romps through old homesteads, but also conveys growing pain as his health deteriorates. He makes use of a visiting shaman to let her know that he's appreciative of her love, and accepts her invitation to move on, without guilt, when he's finally ready. Whether or not the reader is able to believe these words as Ganny's own, the author's sensitive handling of grief and pain stands to be emotionally impactful.

Intertwined instances of good puppy humor provide necessary levity, and doggy mishaps and misadventures are certain to charm. The canine voices throughout the project are alternately silly and wise, and if they sometimes blend into one another, this only bolsters the sense of the family's unity and interdependence.

Ganny's Journal is certain to strike a chord with animal lovers, who will enjoy these reflections on interconnection. As Ganny readies himself to depart his earthly life, Hammond's focus veers toward glimpses “of what moves and lives behind all that,” and such chapters will comfort other pet owners grappling with recent losses. An often moving,

imaginative effort, *Ganny's Journal* gives voice to those who approach the animal world with a genuine desire to empathize and understand.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May 28, 2014)

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